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OUR SALVATION

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Our Salvation

The so-called "Jewish Problem" is many problems in one. From the side of the Gentile it is comparatively simple, nothing more than a question of assimilation and of the best methods that will lead to it. To the Jew who values his identity as Jew the problem presents every kind of perplexity.

The circumstances and tendencies of the modern Jew create a *physical* problem of a comparatively novel kind. The growth of what is called urbanism constitutes a menace among all the most highly civilized nations. City population growing at the expense of country population means physical decadence, a lessening in the rate of marriages and births, an increase of disease, crime, insanity and the slums. Could we have statistics on the subject it would be found—the fact is too patent to escape any observation—that the Jew, wherever he has free movement, flocks to the cities in unparalleled numbers. The urban Gentile population is being constantly reinvigorated by the influx of the farmer, the miner, sailor, etc., fresh elements, which act like an upturned black soil of humanity. The Jew has had similar classes to draw upon from the villages, thanks to the mediæval legislation which banished him, for his own good, from most of the larger cities; but what the Russian Government accomplishes by force, the Jew of occidental countries does willingly, concentrating himself into the centers of civilization. Whether such a movement can continue indefinitely without rapid physical deterioration of the type is one as yet unsolved problem.

The same causes render more acute among us an *industrial* problem which troubles civilization; the problem of over-education and lessening skill. The learned professions are becoming rapidly overcrowded among all civilized nations, at the expense of lower occupations requiring

skill, while the armies of unskilled labor working at starvation wage are ever on the increase. The Jew crowds and jostles the Gentile at both ends, in the highest walks of life and in the sweatshop; meantime, he largely neglects the skilled trades, and will never develop a farming class. Trade school and farm school have still to prove whether they are not unintentional instruments of "assimilation."

The Jew has quite a number of *social* problems of his own, by which he further complicates the puzzles which have everywhere been created by new political, industrial and educational factors. His social intercourse with the Gentile is made difficult, on the one hand, by the prohibition of intermarriage, on the other hand by that closeness of family ties which forces him to take his relatives along into better circles; not to mention his many peculiarities, such as sensitiveness, self-consciousness, restless ambition, which place a barrier of social estrangement between him and the Gentile. He has, of course, social problems confined to his pale, among which may be counted the interrelationship of Portuguese, German and Russian, of rich and poor, the bounds of "society"; his problems of charity, too, have aspects entirely of their own.

No one will question the seriousness of our *religious* problem. We share almost every disadvantage of position which has come to modern religions from the dominating secularism of our age; we only intensify the worldliness of the modern life, the license of modern thought as against a religion which has made a bold and sudden turn of front in its reform movement. We thus partake of the troubles both of the ancient orthodoxies and of the brand-new intellectualisms, against all of which we must contend without the aid of religion's greatest weapon—a Sabbath. Weighted down as we are, we are handicapped additionally by our congenital inability to organize on large, firm-knitted plans. Not one of these problems is as fundamental and as puzzling, as wide-reaching and impalpable as this *psycho-*

logical problem: How shall the Jew preserve his identity as a type? The preservation of his religious individuality depends on this; the practicability of his continuance as a distinct force is determined thus and not otherwise. The anti-Semite has nightmares of an impending universal Judaization; with far more justice may the Jew stand appalled before the overwhelming torrents of Christian education which storm in upon him from all sides, from school and press, commerce and politics, threatening utterly to wipe out whatever is distinctively Jewish in him.

In my humble opinion we stand here before the most perplexing of all the complications of our position: the inherent alienism of the Jew, for which, in these surroundings, there is only one end—utter submersion in Christianity. I am fully conscious that this means an unreserved indorsement of the major premise of anti-Semitism; I indorse it unequivocally as the only result of honest reflection. Judaism as a mere system of moral and religious truths has no argument to offer against coalescence with Unitarianism; Judaism as the outgrowth of an age-long discipline of a people has a future of boundless promise in the development of that people, whether we call them a race, nation or a "flock." In the individuality of the Jew lies the future, as out of it grew the past achievements, of Judaism; the survival of Judaism as a vital religious force is inconceivable apart from the preservation of the Jewish type in its marked characteristics of mind and heart.

History, especially as interpreted by Jewish apologists, seems to contradict my assertion that the Jew, so long as he remains typical, is inherently an alien. I shall not quarrel over individual examples; but I shall broadly claim that a man may be an ardent patriot, capable of any sacrifice for his country, his soul steeped in the spirit of its literature, his bosom swelling with its glories, and that he may yet have the feeling, all the time, of being an adopted stranger, whose enthusiasm is remarkable, whose patriotism

is not taken for granted. Possibly some historian of culture may take up the study some time of the self-consciousness of the Jew in modern civilization; not of Jews like Spinoza, Lassalle, Marx, who threw their Jewish identity boldly off before they plunged into the broad stream of the general life; but of such as Heine, Börne and Auerbach, of Lasker and Bamberger, Beaconsfield and Zangwill—men whose intense nationalism has always a tinge of Jewish self-consciousness. One is continually reminded, by these undertones, of the author of "Peter Schlemihl," who painted so touchingly his own divided feelings as an emigré that became a great German poet.

These problems which I have sketched very abruptly, each of which admits of, almost commands, extensive argument, portend to me only one solution—the return to Palestine. It is a solution against which my idealism has struggled long, but to which my study of history points as the only one remaining. Until some months ago I still believed that the Jew has his chief mission in dispersion as a disembodied spiritual force which shall preach peace and righteousness, and thus become the international Messiah of mankind. But, with all our great Jewish names, I see no Jewish name in the front rank of wide-reaching moral or religious influences; the cultured Jew is powerfully swayed by the Emersons and Carlyles, Ibsens and Tolstois; he cannot escape the influence of a Beecher or Brooks, a Newman or Robertson; what preachers, by tongue or pen, has he given to the modern world whose names could be ranged anywhere alongside of these? Since Moses Mendelssohn, no Jew has ever found the ear of the people with great religious lessons as the modern Socrates had done on such themes as immortality and toleration. The most cutting sarcasm that could ever be invented against modern Judaism would be to call it a missionary religion. The Jew might dream of taking the aggressive as a world-improver when prejudice will have utterly died down (little need

then!) ; but at present, as towards the prevailing moral iniquities and religious confusions, he is decidedly on the defensive—a defensive, largely, of opportunism.

But *will* prejudice die down? Are its present symptoms merely those of a temporary spasm? Condemning, as I most heartily do, those excrescences of nationalism which have led to despotisms and greeds without number, I cannot but regard the movement toward national solidarity as, on the whole, a necessary and beneficial stage in the growth of the human gender. Leaving aside all theories of race as affecting nationality, it is, on large lines, necessary and beneficial that national civilizations should preserve their individuality and develop it along typical lines. This is the higher political wisdom of the nineteenth as against the eighteenth century; the latter's ideal was that of a vast republic of cosmopolized humanity; the former, with broader toleration, favors the diversification of historic nationalities under congenial forms of government. Once we have grasped the underlying justice of nationalism we cannot but regard anti-Semitism as a chronic disease, caused by festering from foreign matter. It requires considerable courage to say this; it seems granting the whole position of anti-Semitism; but it is simply "judging our neighbor by imagining ourselves in his place."

Let us examine into a concrete case. No man with any sense of justice or humanity could wish to palliate, much less to justify, the hypocrisies and cruelties which are being daily committed by the Roumanian Government; but as no evidence has ever been adduced that these practices are disapproved of by any large portion of the Roumanian people it is safe to conclude that there must be some plausible argument in favor of this terrible course, else the next turn of politics would bring a change. The only explanation that would account satisfactorily for this state of things is found in the superior efficiency of the Jew which would result, under a just and constitutional policy, in con-

quering for the Jew every leading place in the commerce, industry, art, science, education, politics of Roumania. Has any people in history ever submitted tamely to such a conquest on the part of a small number that differed from the majority in descent and faith? Can it be fairly expected that the Roumanian will thank the Jew for bringing him the blessings of civilization and rewarding himself with the wealth and honor of leadership in return?

In Roumania, with a semi-barbarous people, commercially unenterprising, industrially unskilled and indolent, the conflict reaches its acutest form; but in countries like Germany, where the superior efficiency of the Jew is not nearly so glaring, his social and intellectual ambition creates similar embarrassments. Germans who profess themselves fond of the Jews and who condemn anti-Semitism in unmeasured terms are yet unwilling to see the Jews occupying a majority of the professional chairs or of the public offices, and consider it a deplorable necessity, but no less a necessity, that the nominal equality of the Jew should be nullified "auf Administrationswege" whenever he threatens to overcrowd the avenues of preferment. It is granted by them that the economical virtues of the Jew benefit the country he lives in; that his enterprise stimulates its commerce; that his ambition spurs his Christian competitor; but it is altogether beyond the altruistic capacities of any nation whatsoever to yield its foremost places willingly into the hands of a strong-typed class of a few people and thus to humiliate national pride, out of a mere sense of justice or in acknowledgment of gratitude.

Anti-Semitism seems to me, therefore, an absolute impasse, so long as the Jew continues the same strenuous individual; it is a case where the oil feeds the flame and the flame ever renews the oil; anti-Semitism only fans the Jew's intensity, and vice versa. The only alternatives here are either submergence or emergence; either we must follow Bismarck's advice and mingle the precious Jewish drop with

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the whole blood of Europe, so as to dilute the former to the desired degree of thinness, or we must withdraw to where our individuality may have free play.

For my part I cannot understand how, at this stage of the world's civilization, thinking Jews can recognize this alternative between utter assimilation and national resurrection without declaring themselves unhesitatingly for the latter. If Judaism were a system of religious truths and nothing more, if all that is needed were simply the preservation of these truths, then we could consistently and with dignity march into the Unitarian camp, embalm our ancestral pride in family trees and store our traditions and ceremonies in some Semitic museum among the other offensive Orientalisms with which many of us have become so impatient; our truths would be very safe in the libraries; by far the largest and best part of them we would have carried along into our new churches.

But if Judaism is religion preached by example, a law made living in a great national heart; if Judaism is a great Bible of lives and loves, of historic yearnings and deep-seated, mystical strivings; if Judaism is righteousness burning to nationalize itself, the patriotism of justice dreaming of its final world-conquest—then how can any Jew think with complacency of wiping his people from the slate of world-influences at a time when abstract truth and theoretical justice appear so weak, as against the reawakened greeds of commerce and diplomacy?

II

The reception with which the Jew has met on the part of the people in whose midst he lived has always exercised an important influence on his manliness and spiritual growth. When his faith and customs were attacked and ridiculed, a Philo and a Josephus defended them; when he was detested and persecuted, expelled or burned as a heretic,

his courage and his self-esteem rose against the fanatic's hatred; he clung the more to his faith, he grew in dignity and firmness. The crowded Ghetto along pestilence-breeding river-banks could not stunt his stature; he had resources of temperance, self-control, a marvellous home-discipline of authority, affection and religious poetry to oppose to the mephitic narrowness and dispiriting ugliness of his surroundings. He felt himself aman, exiled for his sins, severely tried by Providence, but infinitely superior to the benighted mobs that hounded him.

The true degradation of the Jew began with the decline of Christian fanaticism. When the Jew was no more hated as an infidel, or detested as a human fiend, but despised as a *Handeljud*, loathed as a cringing, greedy, tricky descendant of Judas; when legislation aimed, not at punishing him for his heresy, forcing him into conversion or keeping him apart like an infected herd, when poll-taxes and other annoying regulations, following the policy of the yellow patch, sought to mark him out as an object of contempt and ridicule, then, with the outward civilization rising into enlightened forms, he felt more and more the sting of prejudice.

And now we may observe a two-fold course in the treatment of the Jew by modern nations, speaking, of course, along loose lines of distinction: there is the barbarous, brutally straight forward policy of the despotic East which aims, with all the shrewdness of economical reasoning, at the physical and intellectual degradation, as well as the commercial and industrial suppression of the Jew; there is the racial antipathy and social prejudice of the West which pursue the Jew, from the mock-names of his school-days, through the barriers of society, the slanders of business and the partialities of public office, all through life.

Somewhere in one of his dramas, Schiller puts this great truth into the mouth of a heroic character that "a noble heart may school itself to endure bravely many a

terrible blow, when it would break down under the gnats of continuous petty annoyance." The Jew has shown marvellous endurance under suffering; he has played, in Zunz's words, "a national tragedy, lasting fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes;" he is now called upon to endure the vexations and provocations of a jealousy which is void of every great motive, unprompted by any noble aspiration or deep conviction, but cunningly ingenious in searching out his sensitiveness, afflicting his self-esteem, defeating his ambitions. Formerly he had his shell of isolation to retire into, the Ghetto where he was among his own, a Ghetto which had been made for him, where he could be by himself without incurring the odious charge of exclusiveness; he had great convictions which upbore him in his tragic role, a home-life which sparkled with religious poetry and nourished a proud sense of superiority; now he is asked to live in and mingle with this hostile world where equality is held out to him as a mere theory, with prejudice and discrimination as the realities at the back of it. The heroism which he is now called upon to display has nothing of the footlights about it; but it would be a far rarer and more difficult heroism to exercise than was that of his forefathers, even if he had, to fortify him, the unwavering sense of the supremacy of his faith and the just scorn for Gentile barbarism which upheld his ancestor. It is a heroism, not so much of bravery as of patience, not of acute suffering, but of irritating pin-pricks, a struggle of loyalty against contempt in which the lines are so loosely drawn as to confuse and weaken the combatant.

There are, accordingly, two systems of exclusion, corresponding respectively with Eastern and Western anti-Semitism, which are progressively aggravating the Jewish problem. On the one hand, every new outburst of persecution discloses growing difficulties of finding an asylum for the victims of oppression. One gate after another is shut upon the unfortunate seekers of new homes, until it is almost a

certainty that another Russian outburst like those of '82 and '91 would force upon such enlightened governments as England and the United States the same policy of complete exclusion which is now perfectly acquiesced in on the continent of Europe.

We need but view this condition in the light of history and of contemporary fact to realize its strangeness and its horror. The Finn, the Raskolnik, the Armenian, the Boer, should they wish to emigrate, would be welcomed with open arms; the Jew who found hardly a single gate locked against him in 1492 will soon knock in vain at the doors of all civilized lands. Some sixteen thousand Roumanians find their surroundings unbearable in their native country; as a consequence every lever has to be set in motion in London and Washington to prevent the adoption of more rigid alien immigration laws, even while Jewish organizations take charge of the movement, lest it overwhelm their slender resources. And what expedient is left us with which to meet the next outbreak of an Ignatieff or Pobiedonostseff?

Right alongside this system of exclusion has grown in Western countries the social ostracism of the Jew. This phenomenon, being of a more subtle nature, is more difficult to define or to follow in its steady growth. A great many factors enter into the question of social relationship, most of them varying in response to local conditions, almost all of them escaping the possibility of statistical calculation or enumeration. In a general way it will be admitted that the spirit of prejudice is becoming everywhere bolder, more outspoken, more consistent and systematic. The most alarming feature of this progress is in the invariable characteristic it has of holding once conquered territory in undisputed possession. The hotel which excludes the Jew may reopen its doors to him under financial stress; the club or the fraternal society which has once banished him, looks henceforth upon the matter as settled forever; such an event as the breaking down of the barrier in response to a newly awak-

ened sense of justice is yet to be recorded in a single instance.

What is worst, the Jew himself accepts these fiats resignedly and remains on friendly terms of business intercourse with their instigators; he will see the Gentile who owes his whole career to Jewish patronage, entering behind the doors closed to himself and will not consider himself betrayed or maltreated; in commercial exchanges on the floors of which he transacts the principal volume of business, he knows himself excluded from office, and yet consents to cast his vote without protest.

We Jews have not yet realized the degrading influence of living resignedly in an atmosphere laden with prejudice. It undermines the manhood of the schoolboy who soon tires of resenting insults, it poisons the friendships of the young man, it renders Jewish sensitiveness more and more acute with the disillusionings of intercourse. To a great extent we are constrained, in defence of our faith, to put up such social barriers as will prevent intermarriage; an intercourse thus restricted will always be deficient in spontaneity and cordiality; and these social Ghetto-walls of our own rearing will always maintain within them an atmosphere of petty provincialism which will be intolerable to every larger, bolder spirit.

This inevitable penalty of our social isolation furnishes the clew to many strange phenomena in modern Jewish culture. The anti-Semites' claim as to the parasitic nature of the Jewish intellect is certainly a distortion of the truth; the modern Jew has furnished at least two original and profound thinkers in Spinoza and Karl Marx; if he has been, in other fields, an intermediary and interpreter, versatile rather than original, brilliant rather than profound, that fact does not by any means condemn him as a useless or even harmful member of the republic of intellect. Yet it is well that the Jew should not close his eyes to the fact that he lacks, in practical enterprise as well as in scholarship, the

broad comprehensiveness and the bold initiative which are required in the pathfinder and leader. Eduard von Hartmann's comparison of the Jew with woman is, to an extent, not altogether unilluminating; it is not only in science that the Jews have not one single name of the first rank to point to; not only in the field of invention that they have not one single distinct advance to record to their credit; but in the realms of history, literature (with the solitary exception of Heine), art and general scholarship, they must be content with second or third rank for their foremost representatives. Their failure to rise to the highest eminences is nowhere more conspicuous than in the great moral and religious movements of the age to which they have contributed next to nothing, in their inability to produce even a third-rate theologian, in the subsidiary, micrological work they have done for their own Bible. Yet even in this last species of work has one of the smallest of nationalities risen to the highest proficiency, proving that originality, breadth, distinction are not denied to a national life on a smaller scale.

We are often reminded how greatly our wandering in many lands has sharpened our wits, contributed to our adaptiveness and versatility, how pilpulism has kept the Jewish intellect vigorous and resourceful; our attention is rarely invited to the reverse of the medal; we are not often warned how greatly versatility of adaptation and ingenuity of interpretation are apt to injure spontaneous, creative powers.

Living in the Christian world, and yet not of it, the Jew will always feel himself an outsider; something will hold him back from throwing himself freely into the broad current so long as he has problems of his own to solve and so long as there are, with every higher movement, Christian tendencies to repel him. From time to time his ardor will be suddenly chilled by the cold impact of prejudice, when he will find the greatest and the noblest souls of his nation, whether in past or present, tainted with Jew-hatred: the poet whom he loves, the philosopher whose system he

may have chosen to follow, the historian who has inspired him, nay, the university professor who has opened to him new realms of truth; it is a disheartening experience to find these, a Fichte and a Schopenhauer, a Treitschke and a Goldwin Smith, on the side of the enemy.

Such and similar causes foster in the Jewish character a certain timidity and diffidence which work great havoc in our ranks and hold us back, in great emergencies, from the prompt and fearless steps that are needed. When, in a great opportunity like that of the Dreyfus trial, the Jew leaves to men like Picquart and Zola the part of aggressive heroism, himself the passive martyr, the appealing wife; when, in a movement for the moral rescue of Jewish slums, an Episcopalian bishop is needed to lead and to exhort; when, in the face of an active anti-Semitic propaganda there is complete lack of all organization or self-assertion, one can hardly escape the admission that the boasted solidarity of the Jew must be largely deficient in vigor and courage.

But there are not wanting signs on every hand that this diffidence rises, not infrequently, to a positive shame of identity. We need hardly dwell on so notorious a fact as the wide-spread aversion, among modern Jews, to the distinctively Jewish name, the foolish pride which many of us will show about not being usually taken for Jews, the silly subterfuges and cowardly concealments to which Jews will sometimes resort in order to hide their Jewish identity. A great deal of rabbinical rage against so-called Oriental survivals is essentially nothing more than unconscious Jewish anti-Semitism, a prejudice against Jewish things, simply because they are Jewish. There are not many who can realize the deep rottenness which is indicated by such aberrations; they prove that the loyalty and manly pride of other days have been largely replaced by the self-consciousness and irritation of shame.

Among the causes which contribute to the pallor and feebleness of our religious life this shame of identity, this aversion to what is positively and unmistakably Jewish in

outward form, may not be the least. Not that our religious life is wanting in abundance of self-assertion, in reiterated claims of supremacy, or in rhetorical exuberance; of resounding noise to keep ourselves in courage there is no lack; but of the quiet assurance which pursues a loved task devotedly, of the conviction and earnestness which guard a faith from loss of adherents, which create an eagerness for missionary labor, of the pleasure in worship and the attachment to religious associations, we have but little beyond what wreckage we have carried over from the Ghetto. The wealthy city community will rear a magnificent temple at great cost; it does not consider itself under obligation to provide free worship for poorer brethren or to assist in the organization and maintenance of country synagogues. When the temple has been built it cannot count upon that devoted attachment and fond pride which caused the olden Jew to shower gifts upon the house of worship, to endow free synagogues, to encourage Jewish learning and Jewish piety by bequest or endowment. Of the whole story of modern Jewish indifference to Judaism, the poverty of our seminaries (not only in this country) forms the saddest and the strangest chapter.

It is not to be wondered at, then, that the record of the modern synagogue should be one of numerous defections and losses, which would be bound to result in final extinction, were it not for the stream of immigration from Jewish centers; where such immigration is wanting the Jewish population stagnates or declines. A Jewish community of long standing cannot review its old lists of membership without identifying, on every hand, the Christian descendants of prominent Jewish families that had drifted from the synagogue.

From these and many other facts but one conclusion is to be drawn. We have claimed it, time and again, to be the miracle of history, how the spirit of Judaism held scattered Israel together without any aid of outward bonds, such as

local habitat, political union, common garb, custom, or language. The history of Judaism in the Diaspora, we claimed was the marvel of spirit surviving body, of an idea constituting a fatherland.

And this, we concluded, makes clear the mission of Israel; his dispersion is divine destiny; Israel, distinct from the nations and yet one with them, unalloyed and yet fully assimilated, permeated with the modern spirit and yet embodying teachings of his own, is to be everywhere, whether individually or collectively, the great teacher of freedom, humanity and peace.

The idealistic conceit of this theory is based upon misreadings of the past and a misunderstanding of human limitations. The spirit of Judaism has always dwelled in a national body, while isolation was forced upon the Jew; the scattered portions of Israel were held together by abundant earmarks of nationality; they existed as sharply defined islands in the seas of bigotry; there could be no difficulty, then, for the Jew in identifying at once the brother-Jew from no matter where, and feeling bound to him by the strongest of national ties.

The miracle of preserving a lofty national genius, while starving out the body which sheltered it, is what we have been attempting, in vain, to perform. It was attempting the impossible, the superhuman. We cannot preserve our faith without drawing upon ourselves the odium of a self-chosen social isolation; we cannot remain racially distinct amid the jealously proud nationalities of to-day, without either rising to a superiority which will incense hatred or falling to a degradation which will embitter contempt. In the poisoned atmosphere of modern materialism we may do both: rise to wealth and prominence, while falling to the spiritual nihilism of the sensualist. If we did, we should melt away like the snows before the April sun; Judaism would die the death of the debauched ascetic.

But this cannot be. The Jew will not barter away his

manhood for the tinsel of social position. The saving remnant that will take up the struggle with poverty in the olden home may not come from the prosperous classes; so much fitter will it be for starting a new civilization. The boldest and the most desperate will make the beginning; the first show of success will convert the opportunist; the long years of the dispersion, the painful training amid modern culture will not have been in vain; there will be a people thoroughly diversified, of experience most varied; a self-respecting people in its own wonderful country, no more to dream of the latter days, but to enact, as a new factor in civilization, its Messianic part.



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